

On Decision of Character

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justified in being regardless of everything but the accomplishment of them. He will forget all respect for the feelings and liberties of beings who are accounted but a subordinate machinery, to be actuated, or to be thrown aside when not actuated, by the spring of his commanding spirit.

I have before asserted that this strong character *may* be exhibited with a mildness, or at least temperance, of manner ; and that, generally, it will thus best secure its efficacy. But this mildness must often be at the cost of great effort; and how much considerate policy or benevolent forbearance it will require, for a man to exert his utmost vigour in the very task, as it will appear to him at the time, of cramping that vigour!—Lycurgus* appears to have been a high example of conciliating patience in the resolute prosecution of designs to be effected among a perverse multitude.

It is probable that the men most distinguished for decision, have not in general possessed a large share of tenderness; and it is easy to imagine, that the laws of our nature will, with great difficulty, allow the combination of the refined sensibilities with a hard, never-shrinking, never-yielding firmness. Is it not almost of the essence of this temperament to be free from even the *perception* of such impressions as cause a mind, weak through susceptibility, to relax or waver; just as the skin of the elephant, or the armour of the rhinoceros, would be but indistinctly sensible to the application of a force by which a small animal, with a skin of thin and delicate texture, would be pierced or lacerated to death? No doubt, this firmness consists partly in a commanding and repressive power over feelings, but it may consist fully as much in not having them. To be exquisitely alive to gentle impressions, and yet to be able to preserve, when the prosecution of a design requires it, an immovable heart amidst the most imperious causes of subduing emotion, is perhaps not an impossible constitution of mind, but it must be the rarest endowment of humanity.

If you take a view of the first rank of decisive men, you will observe that their faculties have been too much bent to arduous effort, their souls have been kept in too military an

* Lycurgus, the celebrated Spartan legislator, is said to have been the son of Eunomus, King of Sparta, and to have lived in the sixth century B.C.